

A Study of Undergraduate Basic Medical Students' Opinions on ways to Improve their Utilization of the College of Medicine Library

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ABSTRACT:

Studies have shown that students rarely use the library these days and thus questioning the function of academic library. In a bid to improve academic library utilization, a study was conducted to obtain students' opinions on ways library utilization may be improved. It was a descriptive cross sectional survey of undergraduate Basic Medical Students not in their final/research year in the College of Medicine, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria. The study uses questionnaire to obtain data from consenting students who met the inclusion criteria. Overall, 174 students were sampled (mean age of 22.71 ± 1.64 years) consisting of 51.7% male and 48.3% female students. The results revealed that only 15.52% of the students claimed to use the library regularly (daily in the five school days in a week). It is their opinion that when infrastructures (80.46%), internet and computers (74.14%) and comfortable reading environments (72.41%) and space (60.03%) are improved, library utilization will be enhanced. These were in addition to improving library staff communication and assistance (59.20%), provision of new and relevant textbooks (58.05) as well as students' education on library use (46.55%) and importance (35.06%). These findings present possible ways the librarians, university administrations, concerned authorities as well as the public, can increase students' use of the library and in turn enhance academic performance.

Keywords: Library, Utilisation, Undergraduate, Medical students.

INTRODUCTION

Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma was established in 1981 by the then governor; Professor Ambrose Folorunsho Alli (1979–1983), of Bendel State; now Edo and Delta States. Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma was first known as Bendel State University, then Edo State University, it was later changed to its present name in commemoration of Professor Ambrose Folorunso Alli. In the take-off stage, there were to be eight colleges namely; College of Arts and Social Science, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, College of Education, College of Engineering and Technology, College of Environmental Design, College of Legal Studies, College of Medical Science and College of Natural Science. The College of Medical Science consists of the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences; located separately from the campus but along the same route, and Clinical Sciences; located in Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital. The Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences consists of 4 departments, namely- Department of Medical Laboratory Science (100 level to 500 level), Department of Medicine and Surgery (100 level to 300 level), Department of Nursing Science (100 level to 400 level) and Department of Physiology (100 level to 400 level). The faculty has her own library within the premises and serves the students and lecturer of these departments.

According to a study [1], the academic libraries are described as the “heart” of the learning community, providing a place for students and faculty to conduct their research and advance their knowledge. He further stated that, in the education system, an academic library or university library or any other library attached to an institution of higher education is the centre of academic life and exists to support the goals of its parent organization. Since university libraries are an integral part of the higher education system, they should provide support services for the formal educational programs as well as for facilities for research and for generation of new knowledge. However, findings showed undergraduates to rarely utilize the libraries in Nigeria and in many other countries [2,3]. The reasons for the poor utilisation have been studied by several researchers and were said to range from the advent of internet [4], online catalogues and new methods of document delivery [5], online data-bases [6], new technologies/electronic resources [7,8], access to information [9] and mobile services [10].

Worrisome, recent study of research year students of the College of Medicine, Ambrose Alli University revealed poor library utilization for research [11]. If these students that are to use the library are not utilizing it, what is therefore the situation with the undergraduates? The primary objective of the

College of Medicine Basic Medical Sciences library is to cater for the education, research and community needs of the faculty of Basic Medical Sciences students and lecturers. Yet, my findings revealed that 72% of the research year undergraduates, do not rely on the college library during their research and I concluded that the library may experience an unacceptable level of library utilization if solution to the main problems are not been addressed [11]. While the findings among the research year students may be a finding of special case of students, the case of those not in their final year is not known. It is important for any information professional working in an academic or any other

library to know the real needs of the user community. Therefore, this study was undertaken to investigate the opinion of basic medical students not in their final year on way to improve library utilisation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

STUDY DESIGN: This study is a descriptive cross sectional survey targeted at students not in their final year.

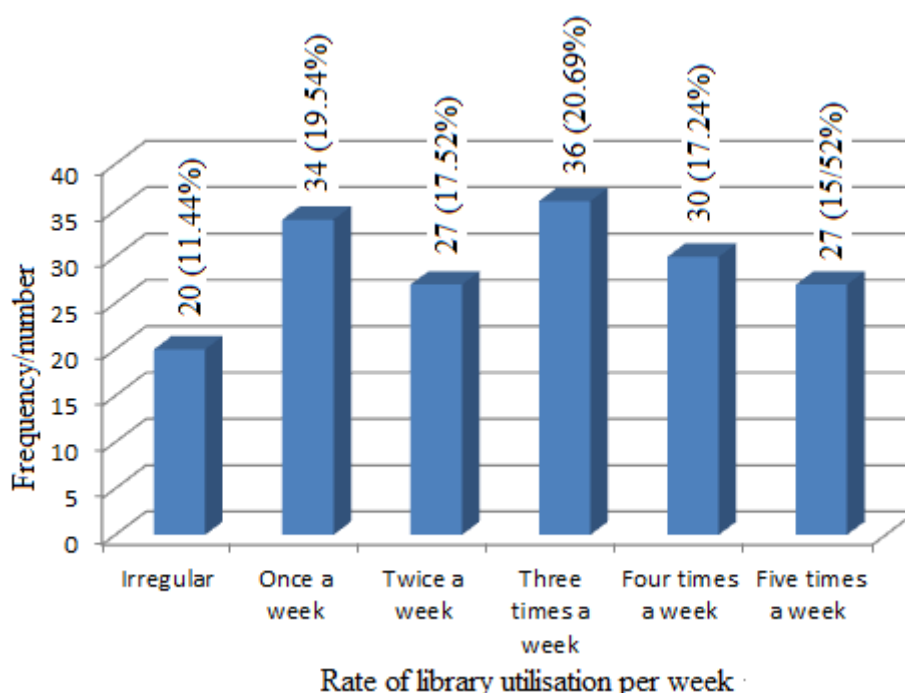


Figure 1: Frequency of library utilisation per week by the sampled students

Table 1: Opinions of the sampled students on ways to improve their library utilisation

Opinions	Yes (%)
Library infrastructures improvement	140 (80.46%)
Provision of internet and computers	129 (74.14%)
Provision of new and relevant textbooks	101 (58.05)
Provision of adequate reading space	105 (60.03%)
Provision of comfortable reading environment	126 (72.41%)
Minimally noise / quiet environment	91 (52.30%)
Strong rules and regulations	57 (32.76%)
Education students on the importance of library	61 (35.06%)
Educating students on how to use the library	81 (46.55%)
good communication and assistance offer by library staff	103 (59.20%)

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION: The study was conducted in compliance with the right of the subject. The study was explained to the students and Informed consent was sort for and granted by all the students involved in the study.

STUDY AREA: This study was carried out in the Faculty of Basic Medical Science (FBMS), College of Medicine, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State Nigeria. The FBMS is in Ekpoma, the administrative headquarters of Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. Ekpoma lies between latitudes 6° 43' and 6° 45' North of the Equator and longitudes 6° 6' and 6° 8' East of the Greenwich Meridian [12].

INCLUSION CRITERIA: Student with Library identification card, who had taken courses/classes on use of library and receives classes in the FBMS premises and belong to any of the four departments in FBMS.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA: Students in research year (400 levels for departments of Nursing Science and Physiology and 500 level for Medical Laboratory Sciences) and students who meet the inclusion criteria but choose not to participate, were excluded.

DATA COLLECTION: Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that has been pre-tested. Using simple random sampling, students that met the inclusion criteria and gave consent to be included were administered the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections (A, B and C). Section A was developed to obtain the demographic information about the students such as sex, age, level and the discipline. Section B contained questions to enable researchers determine their frequencies of using the library on a weekly basis. Section C was designed to obtain information on their opinion on improving their library utilization. Questionnaires that were fully answered were then cleaned and typed into the computer for analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS: The data was analyzed for simple descriptive statistics using SPSS software package version 20.0.

RESULTS

One hundred and seventy-four Basic medical students took part in the study with age ranging from 19 to 26 years and a mean age of 22.71±1.64 years (mean ± SD). They all had a library

identification card and had taken lecturers on the use of library in their 100 level. Female students make-up 48.3% of the participant while male students were 51.7%.

Figure 1 highlights in a table the frequency of library utilisation per week by the sampled students. Irregular library users accounted for 11.49% of the students while those who claimed to use the library three times a week were the majority (20.69%). Those who uses the library twice a week and regularly (that is 5 times a week) presented the least and similar frequency (15.52%).

Table 1 shows the opinions of the students on ways to improve their library utilisation. The most reported opinion by the student was the improvement of library infrastructures (80.46%; n=140). This was followed by provision of internet and computers (74.14%; n= 129) and then comfortable reading environment (72.41%; n=126) and adequate reading space (60.03%; n = 105). Also, 59.20% (n=03) of the student reported good communication and assistance offer by library staff, 58.05 (n=101) provision of new and relevant textbooks, and 52.30% (n=91) minimizing noise and maintaining a quite environment will boost students library utilization. Other opinions mentioned by the students were maintaining strung rules and regulations (32.76%), Education students on the importance of library (35.06%) and how to use the library (46.55%).

DISCUSSION

The present age is characterized by influx of information and more than ever before, knowledge has gained importance that students who want to succeed must seek appropriate information. It is on this background that it was stated that students in institutions of higher learning must be conversant with the variety of resources and tools that can help them get the information they need to complete an assignment and more importantly, their research work, quickly and efficiently [13]. In the present study, it was revealed that undergraduate Basic Medical Students seldom utilized the library as only 15.52 claimed to use the library regularly (figure 1). This finding agrees with the facts in the literature that students like in Nigeria and many other countries do not often utilize the libraries [2,3]. Studies have also reported declining use of libraries within the university system [14,15]. In fact, it is reported that even though libraries are being used, they are reduced to seasonal places of reading as

most students make use of the library when preparing for examinations [16,17].

According to a study, the cause of the poor library utilization is not without relationship to the general absence of teaching methods, independent learning based on students' critical analysis and incorporation of various sources of information to classroom notes and prescribed texts, general reliance by students on lecturers' teaching notes, various problems linked to poor libraries and lack of access to textbooks that are used by generations of students without consideration of the currency of content [18]. The acceptance and normalization of this style of teaching by universities results in the subliminal devaluing of the commonly accepted university culture which demands independent research, critical analysis and use of current information as part of learning [19].

Library utilisation no doubt depends upon so many things and is not limited to proper organization, distribution and availability of books alone. The present study has shown that improving library utilisation; specifically for the Basic Medical Students, will depends largely on infrastructures improvement, availabilities of internet and computers, comfortable reading environment, adequate reading space, enhanced library staff-student communication/assistance and provision of new/relevant textbooks. In support of the findings of this study, studies have reported users to face a variety of challenges including, but not limited to, difficulty in catalogue use, obsolete materials and poor shelving even in cases where libraries have recorded high patronage [20,21]. These opinions by the students suggest that the library has become deploring in terms of infrastructure, ancient in terms of available modern technologies, uncomfortable and small in terms of the environment and population of students. In accordance with these assertions, other studies have previously reported on the deploring nature of academic libraries in Nigeria [22,23]. Lamenting on the problems besieging the development of school libraries in Nigeria, a study [24] stated that there is no clear cut policy on funding school libraries and so they are generally few and ill equipped, lacking proper accommodation, qualified staff, relevant information resources such as books and other educational materials.

On the aspect of infrastructures, comfortable reading environment and space provision of new and relevant textbooks, this study showed that

addressing these issues can enhance library utilisation and in turn academic performance of the medical students. This finding showed that the library is not been catered for and is supported by a study [25] who disclose serious deterrent of school libraries in Nigeria. Hence, the question, how can the library meet it services when it's not catered for? The unconcerned attention given to the library is no doubt in line with the revelation by a study [26] that policy-makers, fiscal planners, administrators and other technocrats in Nigeria are yet to appreciate the pivotal role of library and other information institutions to the nation's development quests. A study [27] has put the blame of poor development of school libraries in Nigeria on the government. Worrisome however, will the blame of noisy environment, poor rules and regulations, education of library staff and students reported by the students (table 1) also be on the government? Consequently, indicating that library management, institution authorities and academicians also have a part to play in improving library utilisation by students. Accordingly, this is in support of the view by a study [25] that the serious restraints of Nigerian school libraries development are due to the lack of recognition by the institution and government authorities. Curiously, the students' opinions that education on library use (46.55%) and importance (35.06%) can improve library utilisation (table 1) indicate that a hug number of students may not have been exposed to library classes or resources, and thus the unawareness. According to a study [28], this can be partly blamed on faculty staff, course staff or library staff. In view of this, a study [29] reported it is paramount for librarians to provide up-to-date comprehensive library and information service needed to satisfy the information required by users. This also point to the need of interdisciplinary collaborative effort between library staff and the academicians.

In view of the reports in a study [28], the more an undergraduate uses the library, the more familiar the student will be with its resources. In another line of thought, why should a student use the library when there are several factors limiting him/her? Why should a student be aware of library rules and regulations (see table 1) and resources when he/she sees the library as a quiet and convenient place to study once book and do assignment? According to a study [29], if students use the library primarily as a quiet and convenient place to study, they may not be aware of its resources at all, as well

as to the student who never puts a foot in the library.

On the aspect of modern technologies such as the internet and computers, it was observed that students are interested in modernizing the library with internet technologies considering the 74.14% who opined this to improve library utilisation (table 1). The traditional library practices must therefore be advanced to embraced modern technological facilities if the library is to be relevant to this new information age. In support of this assertion, a study [30] reported that modern-day library should not only entails the traditional function of preserving and providing access to vast amount of printed materials but the creation of more sophisticated information environment. This is a very high price which must be paid otherwise the library will eventually become like the legendary character who slept for twenty years at Gasgill Mountain in Gulliver's Travels and eventually woke up to find the world completely changed as previously noted [18].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has shown that undergraduate Basic Medical Students rarely utilize the library and the action is due to amendable factors that can be address by the government, academic and library authorities. It is therefore the recommendation of this study that the findings are made known to the government, institution authorities, academicians and library staff in a bid to addressing the poor library utilisation by students and enhancing student academic performance.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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